

Notes on the New U.S. Perfin Catalog

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By the time you read this article, all the research work will be completed for the forthcoming Catalog. This will leave only setup and production of the Catalog remaining. This will still entail a great deal of work, for it includes producing all the pages for the photographs, with the Catalog numbers and ratings typed into each box. Then, over 6,000 photographs must be mounted in these boxes. Further, the introduction, which will be extensive (and hopefully informative) remains to be written. Nevertheless, this point is a definite milestone in that only physical preparation work remains to be done. The timetable for publication is still not set, for I still do not have a good feel for just how long it will take to type up all those pages and mount the photographs, but the work will progress as rapidly as possible. I want to get this Catalog published just as much as all of you do.

For those who have not yet seen the format for the new Catalog, part of a left side data page is shown on page 17. Unlike the previous Catalog, each listing will have two lines in the new Catalog, with a lot of extra information included. The use of two lines for each listing will limit the number of listings for each page to 24 instead of the 30 of the current Catalog. Thus it was decided to use the same format places for 30 illustrations for the right photo page, the left hand column of 6 spaces will be left vacant. Although this may have the slight aesthetic disadvantage that the page will not appear quite as full, it has the great advantage of leaving spaces to insert any new patterns which may be listed after publication of the Catalog.

As some advance help in interpreting the new Catalog, here are some pointers on the listings.

For the first line:

The first two listings are, obviously, the pattern number and the pattern listed in letters.

The third listing is a description of the shape of the pattern: D = Diagonal, H = Horizontal, 2H = Two Horizontal lines, etc.

The fourth listing shows the period of use of the pattern, at least as shown by the

dates of the stamp issues on which the pattern has been found. The introduction of the new Catalog will have to be read to note some exception, caused by certain issues being used through other issues.

The fifth listing, which can be seen on the sample page for pattern A121.3, is an "R", denoting that this pattern also appears on revenue stamps.

The sixth listing notes that the pattern is known precanceled; (PC) denotes that the pattern appears precanceled, but not from the town shown in the primary identification.

The seventh, eighth, and ninth listing, as in the current Catalog show, * - the identification is positive, x - there is further information in Section IV of the Appendix, and the primary user identification.

For the second line:

The first listing shows the height of each letter in the pattern, as denoted in the listing of the first line.

The second listing gives the number of holes in each letter of the pattern.

The last listing gives the primary city of use for the pattern.

Also at times in the second line is given supplemental information, such as the location of control holes.

The information on the periods of usage of patterns was initiated as an aid in determining patterns which are similar to one another. Another reason was to try to determine if a punch which did not quite match a listed pattern might be a new pattern or was only a die variety on a multiple punch machine. Thus, if the prospective pattern was on a 1908 stamp, while all the copies seen of the listed pattern were on 1917-26 issues, then the prospect could well be the original pattern, used by the company, which was used by the company, which was later replaced by the listed pattern. This information appeared to be so useful that it was decided to do research for all the 600+ patterns in the Catalog. Unfortunately, this was a huge task and took a lot of time.

It certainly cannot be said now that the task is done, for once the Catalog is published, many collectors will find that they have patterns for which the stamps fall outside the listed range. Nevertheless, the recorded data will give a good idea of the distribution of use of perfins patterns. It can easily be seen that the majority of patterns were introduced within the first decade of the start of perfins in the United States (1908). Thousands of the patterns were first used on the 1902, 1908, or the 1912 stamp issues.

I know that not everyone can be pleased all the time, but it is hoped that collectors will for the most part find that the new Catalog contains valuable information and is useful for their collecting purposes. One controversial aspect was whether to include the philatelic patterns in the body of the Catalog. Recognizing the legitimacy of the argument that they do not deserve a place with the commercial perfins, it was decided to include them because if they were only in a separate section it would cause confusion with collectors trying to find them.

It was also decided that all pattern would be included in the body of the Catalog if it appeared that they were genuinely used in quantity on postage stamps for postal purposes, even if the patterns are technically illegal according to the Postal Codes. Who really cares if they were illegal so long as they saw genuine use in the mails? Certainly the Postal Inspectors didn't care, why should we?

These are just two of the problems; there were many others, about which collectors could care less, although they drove the Editor to distraction. These included where to list patterns when the intricate nature of the pattern and the listing rules made it almost impossible to list according to the obvious reading of the pattern. This was usually resolved by trying to reduce confusion on the part of the collector, in spite of breaking rules. Although some of you will disagree with some of the editorial decisions, I hope that overall you will forgive me.